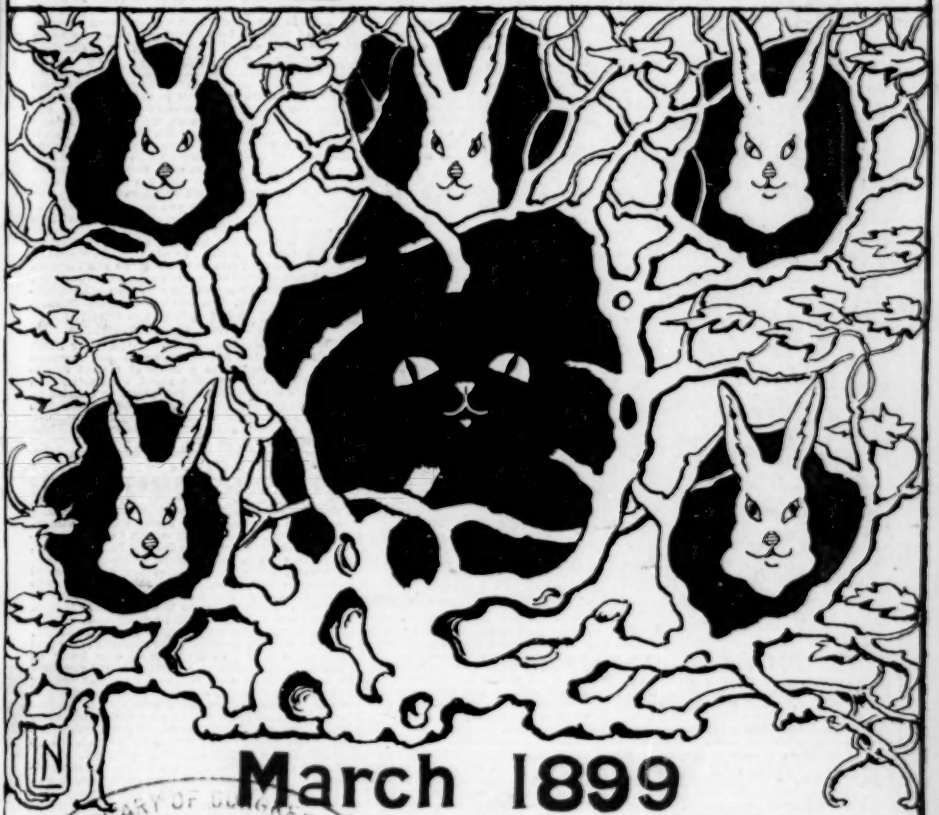
5—California Stories—5

The Black Cat



March 1899

Underwater House.
Frank Bailey Millard, Larkspur, California.

A Prince of the Jungle.
Carroll Carrington, San Francisco, California.

A Death-Angel in Overalls.
A. H. Hutchinson, San Francisco, California.

The Castro Baby.
Mary Austin, Independence, California.

A Sagebrush Cicada.
Miriam Michelson, San Francisco, California.

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The Black Cat

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Underwater House.*

BY FRANK BAILEY MILLARD.

"I shall be built of glass, dearest, and it shall be at the bottom of a lake. There shall be rows of taku plants all around it, with their beautiful submarine flowers, and we shall have palms and orchids inside it. There is nothing these black men may not do under my direction. What a cool retreat it will be for us in those hot days of the tropical summer!"

Thus wrote Frederic Vining, under a cocoa tree on an island in the South Pacific, to his sweetheart, Marcia Tait, in Boston. And, having promised, he set to work.

To you and to the world Frederic Vining would have been only a cold man of science. An impassive countenance, eyes of that Norse gray in which there is the least of fire and the greatest of penetration, together with what they had called at Harvard "Vining's infernal uppishness," made him a man to be reckoned with at arm's length. And yet no undergraduate in his class had warmed up to his Faraday or his Darwin as Vining had done, and no one

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burnt as much oil over induction theories or tinkered more tenaciously with the electroscope. Socially, too, no one of the college was less beset by genteel timidities. Freed from college, he had climbed fast. He had bagged big game in three or four scientific fields, but at last had left all else and gone from settled choice into the broad and tempting domain of electricity, with all its ambition-inviting lures. His widowed mother, on whose fingers blazed gems that alone would have placed her high in plutocratic society, gladly gave him money for all his experiments, and the sight of his laboratory made the heart of many a struggling inventor to ache with envy. The mother died and her son built a costly monument over her grave and went to Europe. There his friends of the alumni lost trace of him for a year or two, and then they heard that he had loaded a ship with all manner of electrical materials and had sailed to the South Pacific, where, on some anonymous volcanic island, he intended to pursue his studies outside the leash and beyond the whip of civilization. His friends were not surprised, but they were curious: Still, as none of them knew where to write to him, he was not worried by their questions. But once every three months (the trading schooner touched no oftener) a letter came to Vining. It was addressed in that very large and angular handwriting which many young women affect because many other young women affect it. When Vining received one of these letters there came over his face something that was almost a smile, and once he was observed by one of his helpers — a white man — to raise the envelope to his lips. The sight of that wild demonstration caused the helper so much astonishment and perturbation that he dropped a costly glass disk to the floor and broke it into eighteen small pieces.

The kissing of the envelope was in the days before the *Mary Ellen* had put into Port Vining and before her crew had told those much befringed tales of wealth to be had at the pearl islands to the north. In the evening of the day that the *Mary Ellen* sailed Vining had called his man Toli to summon a white assistant to his cabin and had then learned that the men he had brought to the island of Kau had all sailed away on the schooner. Toli had thought that his master would be very angry, and when he had told him of the desertion he ran into the thicket. Peering from

the brush he saw Vining look away toward the north for a moment and then light a cigar.

Soon after that an ugly look came upon the face of the savage, for Malia, the most beautiful young woman of the island and shapely as fair women are in dreams, approached Vining shyly and touched his arm. Toli saw Vining smile upon the girl and soon she was sitting beside him and they talked softly as the shadows deepened. Then Toli went away. All he said was, "Wait!"

Next day Vining went over to the place where the Kauans, under their black overseer, were laying the foundations of the "glass palace," as the proud savant called it, and truly it promised to be of palatial dimensions. It was situated in a great punch-bowl of a valley, a mile wide, into which Vining purposed to turn a river and thus make a lake. The blacks lazed at their work, but, as there were many of them, and they had been well trained, there was not much of false motion, and the palace grew under their hands.

In the months that followed, Vining kept the work well under his eye, and when the last great plate of glass, the making of which had so mystified the people of Kau, was in its place and firmly cemented, the flood-gate was opened and the water began slowly to rise about the crystal walls.

A few months later Frederic Vining wrote to Marcia Tait:

"The water is fathoms deep over the roof and the takus are growing about the windows of Underwater House. You have no idea how clever these natives are at diving and working under water. They have stopped every leak and planted the takus everywhere about the house. These takus are wonderfully tough plants, like ropes, and they grow long, with occasional large flowers that are beautifully colored.

"You said in your last letter that you would come in December. Better put it off till April, for you must remember that your winter is our summer, and you should not begin here in the hottest weather, but in the coolest, so that your acclimation will be the easier."

Malia was at his elbow while he wrote, her black eyes shooting love straight at him, and Toli, from a little distance, was blacker of brow and muttering more deeply than ever.

But it was not Malia's love that caused the writing of this letter of postponement. Vining had but played with the soft little maid of the south. She had filled some of his leisure hours when he was book-tired or tobacco-tired, and he knew nothing of Toli's volcanic jealousy. The real trouble lay deeper. There had been vague grumblings down Tonga way. The islands to the south had threatened war upon the people of Kau. Vining did not know that Toli was a Tongan who, in his youth, had been enslaved by the blacks of Kau. As a matter of fact, Toli had been in secret communication with his people for months and stood ready to betray Vining and deliver him into the hands of the southern savages, who were stronger and more warlike than the Kauans.

When the letter was signed and sealed, Malia, who had known better than to speak while Vining's pen was busy, purred softly to the man she loved, and brought him breadfruit from a near-by tree, serving it daintily upon a large leaf.

"The days pass," she said, "and the moons come and go, but the great one stays and loves me. He will never go."

"No," said the great one, with a new sense of the smallness of the part he was playing in trifling with this steadfast love, and his thought running upon the tender terms of his letter and of Malia's utter ignorance of them and of many things. "No, I do not go and I have no wish to go. Now, run with this letter down to the schooner, Malia. It will sail soon. Be fleet."

Malia, grasping the letter, was off down the slope to the beach, like a gull upon the wind, and Vining called Toli, who fawned and grinned and told him again, in answer to his questions, of the weakness of the Tongan warriors, who were small in number and who were women and children and not fit to fight the stalwart Kauans.

But there were older men than Toli on the island of Kau and these urged preparations for strong defense.

"They have guns," said a man whose father had been eaten in a Tongan feast, "twenty, thirty guns, and they can shoot straight."

"I wish you could tell me what kind of guns. Have they repeating rifles, like ours?" asked Vining.

"I know not, but I know they can shoot, and they shoot straight."

"Well, we'll have some target practice, this afternoon. You, Nerido, shall be captain. How many men can you muster?"

"Plenty men with spears, but only ten with guns, and the men of Tonga have twenty, thirty."

"Yes, but there are the torpedoes to blow up the war canoes. I will show you how to use them. And there are the little battery and the mortar. We can keep them off."

"We try hard, chief," said Nerido, bowing and going forth to summon his men.

Day after day went by and the waters lay calm about the island and no war canoes hove in sight. As his sense of security grew, Vining took up his experiments again and made good progress.

On a day when the air trembled with heat and there was a mass of heavy reading to do, he lolled on a divan in the glass house under the lake. It was a place of peace there beneath the placid waters. Looking far out into the perfectly transparent depths he saw the takus sway as the fish glided silently past them. Sometimes a gold-red fin would fan the outer surface of the glass close against his face, or a brown nose would be gently flattened against one of the great panes. The fierce sunlight of the upper air was softly screened by the green waters, and to the eyes there was a sense of relief and of rest.

And the calmness, the silence, the serenity of it all!

Vining heard a soft rustle near him. He turned and there was Toli, half in and half out of a darkened nook in the farther partition wall.

"Ah, Toli, bring me that book-rest and then run away and don't bother."

The master's eyes were not turned to Toli's, or he might have seen the glow of hate and the fierce anticipation in them. When the man had left the room Vining settled down on the cushions to read, but the sweet languor that had so often stolen upon him then came over him again and made his eyes wander from the book and out into the still, cool depths of the lake. His day dream was of Marcia and of the time when she should be there by his side. It

was a delightful dream there in the perfect restful quiet of the under-water world.

Harshly upon that quiet now broke the sound of the telephone bell at his elbow. He started and took the receiver from off the hook and said "Hello, Nerido! What's up?"

A buzz of thick excitement came over the wire. Then Nerido got breath to say:

"The warriors of Tonga! They are upon us! While our men were asleep at noon they stole up from the east of the island and are now in the wooded hills to the north by the lake shore and not far from the tunnel gate of the glass palace. Give us the word! What shall we do?"

Vining glanced about. The waters at his side were not more calm than his tone in reply:

"Call your men up! March them to the rocks by the lake shore! The rocks will protect them from the fire of the Tonga people. Lose no time! But be careful. Waste no shots by idle firing. I will be with you soon."

"Wait, chief. Let me see through my glass again."

There was a pause.

"Do not come out," was Nerido's sharp warning. "They are near the tunnel gate to the glass palace!"

"How many men?"

"Two twenties and more. They are coming on all the time."

"Very well, leave some one at the telephone and go forth instantly with your men."

"I go," quietly replied Nerido, "and I thirst for the blood of the men who ate my father."

"This is an odious position," mused Vining, looking blankly about. "I would like to have a hand in the skirmish over yonder, but here I am like a fly in a bottle with a tight cork. But let them move away from the tunnel gate and I'll try that new rifle of mine to some purpose. Hello, Somalii!"

"Hello, chief!"

"Tie the big wire to the picture window, set the telescope to point upon the Tongans, and keep it there."

"All right, chief."

The "picture window" was what the natives called Vining's

greatest invention. His name for it was the electro-photoscope. By its use any scene that lay under sunlight in the range of a telescope could be mirrored upon a screen at the end of a wire miles away.

Vining now set up his screen in a little dark room off from the apartment where he had been lounging. This screen was merely a large framed ground glass, which he swung neatly into place in the door of the dark room. He ran his telephone transmitter into the black closet, turned on an arc light behind the glass and, shutting the door of the dark room, sat upon a stool.

"Hello, Somalii!" he called. "Why don't you turn it on?"

"The thumb-screw is broken, chief."

"Put in a new one. Hurry!"

In a few minutes a faint image appeared upon the screen before the dark room, and Vining saw, strangely distorted, the features of Somalii, who was bending over the lens of the camera.

"Set up the telescope tripod and swing the glass into place," directed the master.

Over the telephone came grating sounds and a rap or two; then there flashed upon the scene the blurred outlines of the cocoa-palms across the lake, more than a mile from Somalii's camera, but not three hundred yards from the spot where Vining sat.

"Get your focus, man! Get your focus!" ordered the master.

Slowly the blur cleared away, and then sharply upon the screen were shown the edge of the lake, the woods and half-naked warriors of Tonga in a ragged group, some standing still, some sitting and others moving about. Ten or a dozen of the hostiles were approaching the tunnel gate. They came on warily.

"Let's see," said Vining. "I have five mines there, scattered about. Ah, here's the chart."

He turned toward the glimmering screen a piece of glass on which was traced a map, showing the immediate vicinity of the tunnel gate.

"Now that vanguard of black fellows is right over mine four." His finger hovered above an electric button. Then he jerked it away.

"It would be a pity to blow up those poor beggars," said he. "I'll lift mine three and surprise them."

The unerring instrument showed the little advance troop to be within fifty feet of mine three. Vining pressed a button. There was a great red flash upon the screen and the attacking party was carried off its feet by the shock and the surprise. There were also signs of consternation among the main body of the warriors. Raising themselves and stumbling affrightedly, the advance guard fled precipitately back to their comrades. But one of them, wholly overcome by his fear, lay for some time where he had fallen before he crawled away on all fours.

Vining heard a tap at the door of the dark room. He opened it and before him stood Malia, trembling and fearsome.

"What are you doing here?" asked Vining, angered. "You were to come only when I sent for you, Malia, and you disobey me."

"O chief, do not chide me!" wailed the frightened girl. "I knew you were in danger and I have been waiting about in these rooms of the under-water house to see what I might do for you. What do they tell you over the wires? Are the warriors of Tonga on the island?"

"Yes," said Vining, in softer tones. "Look here, girl, do you see them?"

"What wonders! You make their pictures to come over the wire and live before you. You are a great chief, Lataafa. You are a god. But see, here come our people." She pointed to the edge of the screen, where the Kauan band, creeping behind the rocks by the lake side, moved slowly toward the invaders. "They see them; the Tongan warriors see them. Now there will be fighting and blood upon the grass, and—"

"Hush, child!" said Vining. For the arc light fluttered and the picture wavered and he was all impatience.

"Now our people are at the last wall of rocks!" she went on, breathing very hard, "and they stop there. The Tongan men are coming up the lake side. They are nearer and nearer, but there is no shooting. Why is there no shooting, Lataafa?"

"They want our people to fire and then they will try to rush in and win. An old trick, Malia. They have only single-shot muskets. They do not know that our men have repeating rifles. There, our guns are firing upon them; not to much purpose

though, for the distance is too great. Now the Tongans rush in to shoot at short range and make a sweeping victory. That was the trick. Now they begin their fire."

"But see," cried Malia, thrusting her forefinger toward a corner of the screen, "our people's guns are blazing again and again, and they keep blazing! The men of Tonga halt, many of them fall to the ground, and the rest run back to the woods! By the great god of Kau, we have beaten them! They are still near the tunnel gate or we could go forth now and hail the victors."

"Do not be so sure of victory yet, Malia. I think more men were left in the war canoes and these will now come up and join their comrades. Wait a bit, my girl. We must have patience."

But Malia had left his side. She had heard a rustling in the outer room and had stolen forth to see what had caused it. Her eye caught a dark figure gliding silently down the hallway. It was Toli. Her savage intuition sent a fear of treachery to her heart. She ran after the man, lightly treading and making no sound. But after peering about in the dim light of corridors and into dark corners of rooms, she came back, smiling at her fears. She softly opened the door of the room where Vining sat before the screen, so absorbed that he did not note her return. There had been no change in the position of the combatants by the lake shore and the lull was wearying. To relieve the tedium for the moment, Vining had taken up a small photographic transparency, the image in which he now projected upon the screen into the sky above the wooded hills of Kau. Malia saw the picture. It was that of a young and very beautiful white woman, to whom Vining addressed warm words of love in half-whispers, yet audible to the dark creature, and each word pricked at her heart and stung her. She leaned upon the lintel, her world reeling beneath her.

"Marcia," she heard him say, "Marcia, I will send for you now and you shall come here and be queen of my island. Its simple people shall work only to save you. I will send for you and you shall come and be my bride."

Malia, stricken, made no sound, but she stole away again and ran with indirection about the palace. Now and then she would pause and look out into the depths and wish that she might escape beyond sight or sound of the man she loved. In one of the darkest

corners near the gate that led to the tunnel she was suddenly grasped in the arms of Toli.

"Malia, dearest!" he breathed hotly, "come with me and leave your white lover! Come!"

Her hurt love and her hurt pride responded quickly,

"Yes, Toli, I will go with you." Yet a moment before she had hated this man and she had always shrunk away from him and his oft-told tales of love.

They passed through the gate and stood in the tunnel outside. Here Toli turned, and, taking the keys, double-locked the gate. Then, taking some heavy iron bars, he propped them against the great door.

"What are you doing, Toli?" she demanded, in instant alarm.

"I am locking him up in his tomb. He will never escape from that place. I have opened a secret flood-gate, a small hole that I made in the masonry when we were building the palace. He knows naught of it. The hole is in the first chamber to the left of this gate. That room is lowest of all. It will fill up first. It will be full before the floor is wet where he is. There is no escape for him."

"Toli! Toli!" she cried, in an agony of fear. "Why did you do this?"

"Because I hate him and I am a Tongan. Come, I will take you with me to my people. You shall be a princess in Tonga, a great woman. Come!"

He grasped her fiercely and fairly dragged her along the passage. Soon they were nearly through the tunnel.

"O Toli!" she gasped in affright. "I am so wearied. Do not pull me so fast. Let me rest. How large did you say the hole in the masonry was?"

"As large as your body about the hips. Why do you ask?"

"Do you think the lower chamber is full yet?" she asked shuddering.

"Perhaps. No, maybe not. It is a large room."

"Then," she thought, "the water is not up to him yet. I could save him. As large as my body about the hips!" She sank back upon the ground at the tunnel's mouth.

"Oh, I am so tired, Toli!" she pleaded. "Let me rest."

"Well, stay here a moment while I go out and see how the fight is going on. Of course, our people of Tonga are victors, or will be soon."

"Ah, he does not know what I saw upon the screen! I am a woman of Kau. I shall never go with him to Tonga. Princess? Bah! A Kauan slave is better than a Tongan princess. Quick, or I shall be too late."

She rose like a deer, and like a deer ran above the mouth of the tunnel and stood amid the rocks by the lake shore. She saw the Tongans fleeing away in the distance toward the sea and farther out she saw more Tongans, pushing their canoes from the shore and embarking hastily in flight. She saw Toli running back to the tunnel's mouth, knife in hand, and she knew that he was looking for her and would no doubt search the whole length of the tunnel, thinking she had gone back. She knew he would prowl in the passage like a wild beast. There was no entry that way. Quick! To the water, while there was yet time. Stripping herself to her dark skin, she plunged into the lake and swam like a fish toward the glass house. There was no better swimmer or diver than she among all the islanders, and she was not long in reaching the place where, looking down, she could see the iron ribs, though not the transparent roof of the palace.

Upon the vision of Vining who was gazing out into the depths there shot the strange sight of the beautiful Malia swimming under the water, within a few yards of where he sat. She was passing along the side of the wall and searching eagerly for something. He knew there was a cause for alarm and he motioned to her hastily. She could see him and she smiled the smile of a beautiful mermaid, her eyes showing clear in the water and her black hair streaming in a long mass over her back. He followed her on his side of the glass and soon came to the entrance to the lower chamber. He opened the door and stepped down the stairs a few feet, when his boots touched the water, and he drew back.

"Why, the place is flooded!" he cried. He turned a knob at his side and the electric lights above and below the water glowed sharply, lighting up every corner of the room. He saw the girl rising, but soon she dove down again. Both of them could see where the takus waved gently toward the wall, as if in a slight

current, and both knew in the same instant where to look for the hole in the masonry.

Vining saw her sweep a full, round arm and grasp a strong ropy taku, and with her head pointing away from the wall and her feet toward it, she let the current carry her gently toward the hole.

"Malia! Malia!" he yelled, with no smallest sense of what she really purposed. "Don't try to come in that way. I will let you in at the gate."

He motioned violently. Then he ran to the gate, near at hand at the end of the passage. He tugged at it.

"Barred from the outside!" he groaned. "That treacherous Toli!" He ran back, calling to Malia. She did not look at him. She could hear no word. Her feet had entered the hole and her body was quickly sucked into it up to the arms, which, being braced, would not permit her further entry. Then while he shouted and waved his hands and raged like a very madman, she quickly tore up the moss and the muddy clay and placed it about her body in the apertures that remained between her and the concrete. He saw, now that she had come forward, what she had done. With her body she had closed the flood-gate and stopped the flow of the water into the palace. She tied taku roots about her shoulders, and plastered about her beautiful breast more and more mud and moss, and then, peering above the edge of the masonry, looked at him and smiled a faint, watery smile, and yet one full of love and farewell.

"Malia! Malia!" he called to her in an excess of grief. "Malia! To think that you should die to save me!"

She saw his lips move, and smiled and tried to wave her hand. Then a great throb moved her and large bubbles rose through the water from her mouth. Her shoulders jerked strangely and then she lay still, with her head pillowed upon the mud of the lake bottom.

But the water rose no higher in the room. With her body and with her life, Malia had saved the palace from flooding and had saved from death the man she loved.

Vining had two hours of reckless pacing up and down the corridors and needless banging at the tunnel gate before Somalii,

who had hastened from the telephone at his master's wild call, came running through the tunnel to set him free. On the way to the gate Somalii had met Toli, fleeing away like a fiend of the night and crying aloud, "Malia! Malia! Malia!"

"Victory, chief! Victory!" shouted Somalii. "The men of Tonga have all left the island and they have left many dead warriors, too."

"Yes, but I have paid my price for your victory. It is not without its cost," said Vining simply, pouring forth a world of misery with that breath.

. . . . . .

The schooner came into the cove and there was a fluttering of a handkerchief from the after-deck. Vining rowed out in his boat.

"Fred! Fred!" was the glad little cry from over the rail. And then on his nearing her, "How brown you've got!"

He kissed her and rowed her ashore.

"This is a great surprise," said he. "Of course you never got my letter. You were not to come, because the Tongans were making war upon us. But that's all over now. We have routed them, so there's nothing to fear. And I'm glad, after all, you took it into your head to steal upon me unawares."

He showed her about the island and she proudly noted his inventions, which looked so important and were so hard to understand. She agreed with him that it would be best to have the captain of the schooner perform the ceremony that afternoon.

"But your glass palace — Underwater House," she said. "I am dying to see it. How do you know I'll like it and that I'll be willing to stay here after all?"

"Oh, it's too damp to go in there. I've just had some leaks stopped and they're pumping out the water. Nothing to worry about, you know. It happened during our fight with the Tongans. You need never fear such an occurrence again. But you will like that house up on the hill there much better, anyway."

"Oh, anywhere," she chirped, "only I had thought a good deal about the glass house and the pretty divans and mirrors and all."

They were married on the veranda of the house on the hill and the schooner sailed away and left them in their tropic home.

Next evening Vining was alone upon the lake in his boat. He was rowing shoreward with short, nervous sweeps. He sprang ashore hastily and ran fast. He had only just reached the house on the hill and Marcia, radiant in her soft white gown had come out to meet him, when a mighty shock made them both stagger and nearly fall. Then there was a low rumble and away out on the lake they saw a great spurt of white water which showed itself for a moment and then disappeared.

"What was it?" cried Marcia, clinging to him and trembling violently.

"That was Underwater House," said Vining, in such a good imitation of surprise that she could not have noticed anything of relief in the tone.

"Did a Tongan spy leave an infernal machine in it or something?" she asked.

"Yes, without doubt. A high explosive of some sort has been let loose there. Really, I'm not sorry. I had grown weary of it. It is more to my liking up here, where there is good air to breathe. I could not longer have endured the oppressiveness of that place."

"I thought you liked it. Was it so dismal there, after all?"

For answer he kissed her.

A Prince of the Jungle.*

BY CARROLL CARRINGTON.

MY friend Millwood was one of the most refreshing geniuses it has ever been my fortune to meet in the human desert we call life. He continually interrupted the ordinary run of incidents in my own life with singular diversions from the common ways of men. In the long level stretches of mediocre experiences with my fellow-travellers in the desert he was an oasis, sparkling with a most welcome change of mental scenery whenever I came upon him for any length of time.

We were together a great deal — partly because one of his peculiarities was a truly remarkable liking for my society, but more particularly because I made a point of feeding that peculiarity to the upmost limit of his forbearance, and somewhat beyond the limits of the best deportment. Dignified reserve is a thing I much admire to see maintained by other persons, but my liking for Millwood was so insistent that it drove reserve clean out of my own observance and put me in a very unconventional light with him — for which, indeed, he seemed to fancy me all the more.

So when he took into his head the idea of building him a home on the side of a sheer declivity three hundred feet above level ground, and chose the wildest mountain in the Coast Range for the foundation of his queer experiment, I was included among his assets in the undertaking, and soon found myself a partner in his enjoyment of the domicile's construction. Later I followed him to its completion, and entered it as a guest for a season of sympathetic and congratulatory visiting.

It was a wonderful place, set against the hillside like a shelf on a wall — a square, roomy house, with its front supported by

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stilts and its rear partly buried in the hill, whence a notch had been cut out to make room for it. Looking up at it from the foot of the declivity it had the appearance of insurmountable altitude and immeasurable distance — the effect derived from viewing Mount Hamilton's observatory among the clouds from a car window twenty miles below.

Millwood was enthusiastic about it of course; — it was appropriately unique, and it was a wholesome diversion — all of Millwood's manners of being different from other folk were wholesome. His fads were the things which other people would do if they could think of them; his peculiarities were all improvements upon conventional custom; his little mannerisms in casual intercourse with the world were indexes to deep and well-seasoned habits of sound practicality and intelligent premeditation of a high order. His most uncommon actions — of which many startled his acquaintances — were not freaks of fancy when they were calmly considered, and when he chose one day to buy a panther for a pet, and to chain him at the back door of his house upon the mountain-side, nobody with reason could discern anything to criticise in the proceeding.

The panther was young, with manners in which many a well-bred cat is deficient, and his purr of pleasure at his master's caresses gave him a high place in my esteem, a feeling that warmed in no small degree when he extended the same friendly purr to my own advances upon his society.

"There is a suggestion of greatness about such a pet as that," said Millwood to me one evening after I had accompanied him home from the office in which we were both employed, and had taken up my abode with him for the night, as had been my frequent custom — "a greatness which a fellow can admire. I can't feel anything above toleration for a cat or a dog — they are both weak, over-domesticated creatures, fit to be coddled by children, or, at most, to worry smaller animals, like rats and mice. Give me a royal chap like this black panther and I can positively have respect for him. Bagheera was a noble lord — a prince of the jungle, who would have felt insulted if he had even been looked at by one of the dogs down in the man villages, or one of the cats either — if they had any cats."

"And yet he is one of the cat family," I ventured to remark, idly running my hand over the black beast which lay with his nose at our feet.

"Before the cat was civilized," said Millwood. "Civilization has played the devil with pussy almost as much as with us."

"Since you disparage her so sweepingly, I wonder that you feed our small feline friend yonder," retorted I, directing his attention to a tolerably sleek and eminently satisfied cat of the domestic variety which sat at that moment in the evening sunshine not ten feet away.

"From a feeling of fraternal sympathy," Millwood replied, smiling grimly — "I said that civilization had spoiled both of us."

. . . . . .

The cat stayed and grew into a noteworthy example of her kind — as supple and graceful a hunter of small game as ever my two eyes lit upon, albeit cats have not been overmuch a study with me. The panther, too, developed with excellent favor and came to be a thing you could admire for its power and dignity of address. It is a singular incident that as I grew to admire it more I fell to petting it less — a circumstance of which I was only half conscious, and never in the way of mentioning. Millwood was as attentive to the beast as ever, and finally gave him the privilege of a wider radius of chain — in which he signified a grateful pleasure by joining the cat in an occasional raid upon a village of lizards which throve under a brush heap near the house.

Through this I came to observe the odd fraternity that drew these two four-footed animals into a close companionship. From morning till nightfall they lay side by side in the shade of a tree, or frolicked together in the open space at the back door, and after sundown they grew bolder in their comradeship and made a pretence of hunting together, as their ancestors had made a business of hunting according to the stern law of the jungle before their time. It was a recreation I could have stuck to hour after hour, to see those two perform under this simulation of driving their prey to earth. The panther was the leader in this pantomime, and I make no doubt that he was even more a teacher than a leader. For I observed that the cat watched him narrowly out of the corner of one eye while she copied his movements to a nicety

as the two stole silently up to an imaginary quarry and simultaneously sprang upon it.

No two clocks ever kept time with truer regularity together than did this panther and cat in their every movement as they went through, over and over again, the performance I have described — their forefoot joints bending as one bend, their hindquarters gathering for the leap as one set of muscles, their tails switching with the same stroke, their ears cocked at the same angle, their noses stretched forward and their eyes burning with the same single, time-set purpose. They never got out of time — they always hit off a harmony of action that amazed while it fascinated me; and no more extraordinary sympathy between two beasts have I ever beheld to this day.

Millwood was deeply interested in it and conceived by degrees a respect for the cat which drove out most of his previous theories concerning her. I would often go home with him of an evening and climb those three hundred steps to his mansion in the skies just to watch the animals play together. I perceived after a time that they sometimes varied their method of attack, though never the manner of it; they sometimes chose game in different directions always leaping, however, at precisely the same instant. The panther had coached the cat so uncompromisingly that she had fallen into the exact rhythm of his own movements, and though the panther might leap alone upon his fancied game, and the cat leap alone upon hers some time apart from his performance, the leap of each would correspond from start to finish one to the other.

We became so well entertained with this queer, half-real sport that we took to carrying captive game up to the proficient pair of hunters — rabbits, which we tethered out in the fatal circle of the play hunting-ground, and saw our feline friends pounce upon them with all the ceremonious craftiness of a fox stalking a goose in a hayfield. The hunters took on a fierce relish of this addition to the play, especially the panther, which I began to note, with no very confident eye, was displaying a sort of wildish ingratitude for the favor, which he had never shown for his usual dinner of cooked meat and biscuits and milk, set out for him on the back door-step. It struck me that the thing wasn't so much

of a game to him as jumping on inanimate quarry had been: He appeared suddenly to recognize an element of serious business in it, as well as a demonstration of his prowess as a hunter, and the reflection did much to take an air of picturesqueness out of the play as I watched it proceed thereafter.

I must do Millwood the justice to mention that the rabbit idea was all my own, against which he offered considerable dissuasion, and to which he yielded with reluctance. The argument which finally overcame his scruples was to the effect that his two pets were confined to a single source of recreation in their barren solitude — which indeed accounted for their persistent pursuit of it even after it had grown old and trite to them — and deserved an occasional variation of the monotony.

On a certain evening which will stick in my memory long after many a pleasanter occasion has dropped out of it, some affair took me to the upper story of the house, leaving my host on the floor below. We had been sitting on the little rear porch, watching the cat and the panther go through their grewsome hunting exploit with a fresh lot of rabbits that I had brought up with me from the city, and when I left him Millwood continued to puff at his cigar without making much of a change in his position. After I had spent some time on the top floor, however, a fancy hit me to step out upon the veranda, just above his head, and peer over the railing to see if he were still smoking.

There he sat, sure enough, but he had swung about sideways in his chair and was gazing down the cañon instead of at the beasts' playground. I could see nothing to account for this abstraction and gave him credit for nothing more than a passing mood for meditation. The next moment, however, I perceived the object of his new attention — a lizard sunning himself in the last rays that slanted over the summit above us.

Other eyes than ours were upon the reptile — the cat had him in line and was slowly creeping up to the range which meant death to him if ever she took the measure of it with one of those leaps I knew so well. I became interested instantly, so accustomed had I grown to the strange sport, and I now understood the cause of Millwood's change of attitude. Slowly, one by one, the cat's paws crept out and the lithe gray body stole forward

like a shadow. It was a performance I could time with precision — I knew it by heart. I believe I could have told the exact moment of her leaping if I had kept my eyes shut. As it was, I let my eyes wander, wondering why the panther was not in the game this time — and I found that he was.

His movements were keeping time with those of the cat. Whether it was from habit or not I shall never be able quite to make up my mind, but the main thing about which no doubt was left me was his purpose to spring when the cat should do so. He had all the appearance of having game in view at the same time, and my next thought was to see what the game might be. Following the aim of his attention, my eyes fell upon Millwood.

I tried to locate some other object in the line of his attack, but the ground was all open between. And when I looked for the purpose in his gleaming eyes I saw it to be the man before them as plainly as I saw the mountain ahead of me. There could no longer be any mistake of his intention — the beast was about to make his master the victim of a game which I now realized more than ever had less of playfulness in it than it had at first.

I suddenly grew cold with fear. Three more stealthy glides, and the spring would come. Either a certain tragedy or a disastrous turn to the bit of intended sport was imminent. I took another swift look at the panther's eyes and decided that it was to be a certain tragedy if Providence did not put me in the way of averting it altogether.

If I could speak naturally to Millwood the panther would not notice it. I composed myself as best I could, for my shaking nerves, and said: —

"The panther is almost upon you. Be prepared for him. I'll go for the gun."

Millwood never flinched. He did not so much as look around, a movement that would have been fatal.

"Thank you," he said quietly, "Don't make a disturbance; if I move a moment too soon, or if you move, we are both lost."

At this I came near giving way altogether, at first not understanding his meaning. Then in an instant his desperate plan of escape, which he had conceived as an inspiration of the moment, struck me.

The villanous brute had taken another stride forward and was in the act of taking his next when I turned my glance to the cat. *She was doing precisely the same thing!* The key to the panther's movements was the action of the cat, and Millwood's gaze was riveted upon the cat! She was his index — in her he could see the reflection of his foe and could accurately count his moments of grace before the spring. I knew with an exultant surety what he would do. I kept desperately still and waited, watching the cat all the while as intently as Millwood did.

With a switch the cat leapt upon her prey. At exactly the same instant Millwood slipped out of his chair to the floor. As he went down the back of the chair was struck by four wicked black feet and hurled against the side of the house, the panther across it.

For a second the beast remained as he had landed, panting from the shock and disconcerted at his blunder; then he sprang up with a growl, in time to receive the contents of Millwood's revolver between the eyes.

When I got down stairs the panther lay stretched upon the back porch where he had fallen, and the cat was bending over the blood-covered face, dazed and sorrow-stricken at the sudden calamity.

Millwood took her up in his arms.

"Civilization has spoiled most cats, but not all of them," he said.

"And most men, too," I supplemented, "but not all of them."

A Death-Angel in Overalls.*

BY A. H. HUTCHINSON.

THE cry "Wild game, wild game," would not seem to be very much like the trump of the death angel, nor did the man who uttered it suggest an image of the king of terrors.

He was a very ordinary-looking young fellow, attired in dirty overalls, with a slouch hat pulled well down over his furtive eyes, when he entered the peaceful precincts of Dudley Court with a hand cart and the cry with which this story opens.

Dudley Court looked peculiarly pleasant and peaceful that summer afternoon, and as the dancing shadows of the shade trees flitted back and forth across the sidewalk in front of the neat little houses that closely lined the short court, they flitted also over healthy, happy children, playing on the cleanly swept concrete, and a few of the mothers, sitting on doorsteps, busy with sewing or knitting, while they kept an eye on the children.

A row of posts at the end of the court forbade the entrance of teams, so that the place was less afflicted than usual with peddlers and hucksters, and when this young fellow, with his novel wares, made his appearance, he attracted instant attention. The housewives gathered about him, and, as his ducks, rabbits, quail and pigeons all withstood the closest examination by the most sensitive noses and skilful fingers in the court, while his prices were remarkably cheap, the stock on the cart speedily disappeared, so that a late-comer who came demanding rabbits had to be contented with a brace of pigeons — the last of the stock.

The peddler went whistling away with an empty cart and a full pocket. The housewives went within to consult cook books and prepare appetizing dishes for dinner. The shadows moved toward the east, the six o'clock whistles sounded, there was an influx of

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tired and hungry men, and a whiff of pleasant odors from the doors as they were opened to admit them. After a while, the doors reopened, and the men, now satisfied and contented, came out in their shirt sleeves to smoke and gossip.

Twilight had faded, the conversation among the men had dwindled, and several had retired into their houses for the night. All at once Mr. Paulson, of No. 10, gave a deep groan and fell to the sidewalk, his face purple and his breathing stertorous and painful. His nearest neighbors sprang to help him, with cries of sympathy and pity, and carried him into the house, where they found his wife lying insensible and his youngest boy crying unnoticed in his little bed, complaining of pains in his stomach.

The nearest doctor was summoned, and while he was trying to force some remedies between the tightly set teeth of Paulson and his wife, a neighbor hurriedly entered the house to tell him excitedly that Mr. Brown, across the court, had been seized with violent pains and retchings. Would he please come at once?

The doctor looked up from his unconscious patients and said: "I can't leave Paulson, my man. Go for Dr. McDonald."

The neighbor hurried away. Dr. McDonald was summoned, and then Dr. Kemp. Later Dr. Brown, and then Dr. Breakell were sent for and made their appearance.

In the entire court there was not a house that did not contain one or more sick persons. In some of the houses one escaped, in others it was only one that was sick, but every house had need of the doctors, and to every house the doctors went.

The dawn was beginning to show in the east when Dr. McDonald found his last patient doing well enough to be left for a time, and started for home to obtain a few hours of much-needed rest. As he closed the door of No. 13, he saw Dr. Kemp coming out of No. 2, and stopped to speak with him. They were joined presently by Dr. Breakell, and, as they stood there talking they were gradually joined by the other doctors who had been summoned. After comparing notes as to the condition of the various patients, and agreeing that the worst was over and the patients all likely to get well, there was a pause in the conversation, which was broken by Dr. Breakell, who asked the question all had been wishing, yet hesitating, to propound:

"Well, what do you fellows make of this affair, anyway?"

"Clear case of poisoning of some sort," remarked Dr. Kemp.

"But how and what?" demanded Dr. McDonald. "Do you know of any poison that turns one man yellow and throws him into a high fever, while it gives another man terrible cramps in his stomach and bathes him in perspiration; locks the jaws of a third, and gives him fearful spasms and convulsions? If you can tell me what poison will do that I will be your debtor."

"Gentlemen," said Dr. McCleod, the oldest of them all, "I have practised in various parts of this and other countries; have had experience with epidemics and with poisons, and I am more puzzled than ever before. I confess to a belief in the poisoning theory, but I can find no poison to account for the symptoms of the four patients who have been my particular charge. If I did not know it to be improbable, and almost impossible, I would be willing to swear that, of the four patients, one is afflicted with yellow fever, another with cholera, a third with tetanus and the fourth with smallpox in its first stages. It is a mystery to me."

A young doctor who had not before spoken here remarked:

"I have had experience with Yellow Jack in Memphis, and it seemed to me that one of my patients had it, and had it bad, but the rapid recovery is what stumps me. He is almost well now, and whoever heard of yellow fever running its course in less than twelve hours? Besides, this patient's wife was very ill also, the first part of the night, and her symptoms were entirely unlike those of the man, and, aside from extreme exhaustion, partly consequent upon her fright, she is now quite recovered."

The others had listened with grave attention and confirmatory nods. Their experiences had been quite similar.

No one could offer any solution of the difficulties involved, so, after a thoughtful silence they separated and went to their homes.

Later in the day the doctors returned to the court, and all the patients were found to be doing well. If physicians had not been so promptly summoned it seemed probable that several would have died, but, as it was, they all made a good recovery, nd only one or two were confined to their beds after the first day. These two were women, and had been badly frightened.

The doctors carefully questioned all the patients, and compared

notes afterward, but nothing essential was elicited. The water supply was the same as the entire city had. The families dealt with different tradesmen, and there was no one item of diet that had been indulged in by all the families in the court. The doctors were as much in the dark at the end of their investigations as at the beginning.

A year went by. One day a doctor who had been working with great success among the yellow fever patients at Santiago de Cuba, after the surrender, using remedies of his own, returned to the city wherein Dudley Court is situated for a rest. Calling upon his old friends in the profession, he found himself one evening seated in the study of Dr. McCleod, in company with the young doctor from the South, and giving them the history of his Cuban campaign.

"That form of treatment for Yellow Jack is your own, isn't it?" inquired the young doctor interestedly. "Where did you get on to the idea?"

"Right here in this city," replied the doctor from Cuba with a smile. "Old Prof. Krebs gave me the idea with his search after that universal germ-destroyer he has been trying to find for years past. He had a laboratory over on the South Side until about a year ago, and used to inoculate all sorts of animals with all the diseases of which he could procure the germ-cultures. Then, when he had a well advanced case of the disease under investigation on hand, he would dose it with his germ-destroyer and kill it off. He never managed to kill the disease without also killing the animal, as long as I knew him. I got some yellow fever cultures from him, experimented, and you know my success."

"Where is Prof. Krebs now?" inquired Dr. McCleod.

"He is in Vienna," replied the other with a laugh. "It won't do the old fellow any harm to tell on him now, but I guess I am the only one who knows why he abruptly left this country, after he had asserted that he meant to make it his permanent home.

"You see, the old fellow was a trifle careless with his experiments, and got a great fright in consequence. His laboratory opened on a garden back of his house, and he kept the animals in a sort of glorified chicken house, that was half chicken house and half hothouse, in the garden. He used to have all sorts of small

animals and birds there, for, as you know, some animals are not susceptible to certain diseases at all. Well, one time about a year ago he had just killed off a stock of animals, restocked the place with a new lot of healthy animals, inoculated them with the diseases that did best with each variety of animal or bird, and was waiting for the diseases to develop. I think he told me he had cholera, yellow fever, smallpox, tetanus, and that queer disease from India where the patient turns a beautiful blue. At any rate, some enterprising chicken thief climbed the Professor's fence one night and carried off the whole menagerie. The Professor was sure he had started several hopeful epidemics, and in fear and remorse he left for Vienna as soon as he could get out of town."

Dr. McCleod was just asking if anything had been heard of the thief or his plunder when the young doctor sprang up with an excited exclamation. Dr. McCleod looked at him with mild surprise. "What's the matter with you, Ed?" he asked.

The young man spoke up excitedly: "The Professor's house was on the South Side and the thief would dispose of his captives as far away as he could from where he got them?"

"That seems reasonable," responded Dr. McCleod, "but what are you trying to get at?"

"Why," responded the younger man, "it seems to me that we now have the explanation of our Dudley Court experience."

The old doctor stared for a moment, then responded emphatically: "By George! I believe you are right."

So it seemed that the thief in overalls had been dispensing cholera, yellow fever, smallpox and lockjaw, and it was only because the diseases had less power, perhaps, when dealt out second-hand, or perhaps because of the cooking the flesh had been subjected to, or possibly on account of prompt medical treatment, that the visit of the disease-dispensing peddler had resulted only in frightening one court instead of inaugurating the horrors the poor old Professor feared he had let loose upon the city.

The Castro Baby.*

BY MARY AUSTIN.

HE sun climbing to its meridian above Little Long Valley on a certain Fourth of July, saw all the population of Maverick passing between the swinging doors of Sidney McLean's saloon. The male population of Maverick usually gravitated in that direction in all seasons; in fact, a considerable number of them might be fairly said to live there; but even in its most prosperous days the Spread Eagle had never known such a pervasive air of feminine flutter and fashion, an air that the capacities of mail-order shopping makes possible even in Maverick.

The womenkind of Little Long Valley were not disposed to look favorably on the Spread Eagle. They were even known to view it with open hostility, and to account its inducements to idling and money-spending as only partially compensated for by the personal good qualities of its proprietor. To-day, however, there was in the bustle of coming and going, in the bunting that displayed itself about the front door, in the crescendo buzz of conversation and the rattle of knives and forks that issued from it, evidences that nowhere in the world could be mistaken for anything else than a fancy bazar.

The fact is, Maverick was undergoing a revival of religion. Maverick was accustomed to take its experiences of whatever kind spasmodically. It had lived through two mining excitements and a real-estate boom, and was still very far from learning moderation. The first excitement had given Maverick a definite location and a name, the second had built the Spread Eagle, which was originally a dance hall, and the land boom had built the railroad to within four miles of the town, where it had become discouraged and turned away into the fastnesses of the Nevada hills.

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Now the revival of religion was responsible for the fancy bazar in Sidney McLean's saloon, because the Reverend Aaron Frear had decided to include Maverick in his fifty-mile circuit, a church edifice was needed, and the townspeople felt that they must rise to the occasion. The question of ways and means had crystallized around the idea of a bazar, where it had halted for some time in a nebulous state, for want of suitable quarters in which to materialize.

Then it was that Sidney McLean came forward with an offer of the Spread Eagle which, having been built in boom days, was sufficiently capacious. What the Reverend Aaron thought of this is not recorded — he did not hear of it until it was too late.

So the bazar was an accomplished fact, and that nothing might be lacking of its wonted features a traveling photographer, who had set up his tent on the mesa had offered "a dozen cabinets in our very best style" as a prize for the handsomest baby.

So Maverick had also a baby show. The voting was paid for at the rate of five votes for two bits. Maverick had not accustomed itself to smaller change, but it knew how to divide up and distribute the benefits, and the proceeds of the balloting went to swell the building fund.

It was surprising after all how many people could be gathered into Maverick when there was anything to bring them. There were, first of all, the townspeople, who were not any of them wanting, and a good number of farmers from the river bottom. There were owners of mines and the men who worked them; thirteen from the Reward, twenty from the Eclipse mill and smelter, and all the small and solitary mines among the desolate hills poured out their dwellers to make the great American holiday. There was the station agent's family from Lawton, and the weather bureau man from Black Mountain, and a man from Bodie who expected to be the next candidate for sheriff. Last of all there was Miss Mae McCracken. This should have been mentioned first. Miss McCracken was the operator from Lawton; she was a very lively young lady with a fresh complexion such as is not often seen in the rainless, windy West, and spoke English with what she said was a French accent. Miss McCracken was popularly supposed to be as much of an attraction as the bazar.

There was another woman at Maverick that day who told herself that if she had known of the baby show she would not have come. She was the wife of the owner of the Minnietta, and her husband had sent her down to Maverick for the summer because the doctor had told him if he did not get his wife out of sight of the cliffs of Las Vegas he would soon have no wife. There was a grave at the foot of Las Vegas, a tiny grave that a woman's arm might well cover, dug there because about the Minnietta there was not soil enough to cover the smallest grave. The cliffs of Las Vegas showed white from the mine on the further side of the cañon, and the owner's wife watched them days long with wearying eyes, and could not sleep of nights hearing the coyotes howl and thinking of what lay at the foot of them. When it was moonlight the spectral cliffs were terrible in their loneliness, and when there was no moon the darkness was still more terrible, and one night when her husband had missed her he found her at the foot of Las Vegas covering the grave with her arms. It was then that he sent her to Maverick because she would go no farther. Now she sat and watched the mothers of children, and her heart was very bitter.

The balloting for the prize baby was at its briskest early in the afternoon, with the station agent's plumpest twin in the lead, and a rose-leaf morsel of humanity from the river farm a close second.

The man who expected to be sheriff had distributed his votes impartially among all the candidates and was now trying to tell Miss McCracken that if the prize had only been for the handsomest young lady he could make a close guess at the winner. Miss McCracken had heard something of the same kind a good many times that afternoon and was not particularly attentive.

"Oh, look," she cried; "if there isn't that Castro woman from the Six-Mile house, and she's brought her baby. I do believe she thinks it will take the prize too. Just see the way she has it rigged up. Do look, girls. Did you ever!" The girls looked, everybody within hearing of Miss McCracken's contagious giggle looked, to see the little Mexican mother, sitting shy and bewildered against the bunting-draped wall, clad in the thinnest of black cotton dresses, with the shabby reboso that preserved a lingering tradition of her race. The baby in her lap was pitifully

quiet, its tiny, claw-like hands clinging to the mother's and the black eyes in the wasted little face dull with pain as they uneasily blinked, "For all the world like a little brown owl," said Miss McCracken, "but I suppose she thinks it is perfectly lovely."

The baby had on its best frock, and about its thin throat a string of large blue beads that had been the mother's most cherished ornament for years, and to the front of its dress she had pinned a bunch of limp and formless artificial flowers, a part of her wedding finery, carefully preserved. Nobody knew this — the flowers told their own story.

Then a stronger voice took up the tale. "The woman is a fool," said the bluff doctor, who knew all the secret sorrows of Maverick. "A perfect fool! Walked all the way here in the blazing sun just to show off her kid, when it won't live a week at the outside, and she knows it. They're poor, too; Castro was out of work a long time. I told her there was no chance for it. It beats me what brings her here to-day."

But feminine instinct comprehends even that which is beyond the wisdom of doctors.

"Why, she wanted a picture of it and hadn't the money, and then she heard of the baby show. Of course she thinks it is beautiful — and it is, too —" went on Miss McCracken, incoherently, "that is, it would be if it were not so skinny. Anyway, its eyes are perfectly lovely, and I mean to tell her so."

The sobered girl rose from her seat to carry out her intention, and there was a general movement of the women in the same direction, but the woman from the Minnietta had in the meantime quietly crossed over to the Señora Castro.

"Is it your baby?" she asked. The mother nodded, not daring to speak, lest disappointment should overwhelm her, for till now no one had spoken to her.

"She is very pretty," went on the questioner, "what do you call her?"

A thin smile bubbled up and broke across the mother's face.

"Her name is Mary Carmen Mercedes," she said, "but we call her Chiquita."

"Chiquita? That means 'Little One,' does it not?" And the fairer woman smiled back understandingly, as she lifted the

child with a thrill of aching remembrance at its feather weight. It passed from hand to hand among the young matrons, while the mother's eyes followed the mite hungrily, as if she begrudged the moments spent out of her arms, though they were numb with the strain of carrying it for hours.

"It is better with me," she said pleadingly, and the women understood, and when she let it go again for a little while to the woman from the Minnietta, they understood that also. Every one knew of the little grave at the foot of Las Vegas.

Women for whom, until then, the Castro family had not existed, went aside from their pursuits to praise and pet the Castro baby, and the mothers of the previously favored candidates, who had been on the point of heartburning, met each other carrying ice-cream to the Señora Castro, and smiled. By the middle of the afternoon it was apparent that she would have her photograph. Before the time appointed the balloting was closed, because it was time for the Castro baby to go home, and Mary Carmen Mercedes was declared the winner.

The man who would be sheriff covered himself with glory by the speech he made at the announcement, and Mary Carmen made a royal progress to the photographer's in the carriage that belonged to the station agent's twins.

The fancy bazar in the Spread Eagle saloon was carried out to its least arrangement, and the proceeds were such as to lead the Reverend Frear to add an especial clause of thankfulness to his Sunday morning petition. It had been an unqualified success, and the relaxation which followed was not too overwhelming to prevent all Maverick from turning out in carriages and wagons three days later along the dusty, shadeless road to the Six-Mile house.

The event which called them was its own justification. It was the burial of the Castro baby.

A Sagebrush Cicada.*

BY MIRIAM MICHELSON.

FIDELIA'S beauty was of a soft Southern type, which made her seem more like a passionate, warm-blooded Italian than the daughter of an ordinary Silver Hill miner. She had always been lovely, and had had as many admirers in the usually unattractive stages of child life as in all the later glory of young womanhood. Of them all, though, the Colonel was the sincerest and the most faithful.

Of course he wasn't a colonel. Nothing in Nevada is what it is called. If, to be strictly truthful, a spade may not be known as a shovel, Thompson must be considered a plain, every-day and all-night gambler, the Judge should be described as a sot, a sinful old reprobate, and the Great Consolidated Gold and Silver Mining Company a colossal steal. What a blessing is euphemy!

When Fidelia was a baby — a most unusual baby, persistently good-natured and as shapely and glowing as a warm, pink pearl — the Colonel had presented her with a necklace whose coral was no more delicate and smooth than the blush of her satiny cheek. This was in the early days, when the Lady Mine, of whose stock he held five hundred shares, had just reached twelve dollars a share. When Fidelia was six, the ardent Colonel's admiration expressed itself in a magnificent wax doll from San Francisco, which place is variously known to Silver Hill people as "the City," "Down below," and "the Bay."

Fidelia's girlhood was strewn with the Colonel's offerings. He celebrated a winning by buying something for his favorite, thus rewarding himself in the morning for a hard night's attention to business.

When Fidelia was sixteen she rode in the Fourth of July procession, embowered in roses — imported at great expense from

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California, for Silver Hill produces nothing but sagebrush and silver — upon the shining, brass-trimmed engine, which the fire laddies pull along by means of flower-wreathed ropes through the hot, dusty, narrow streets, under the blue of Nevada's marvelously clear summer sky. Then the dusky loveliness of Fidelia's cheek was burned a ruddier hue, her eyes sent back a smile of pleasure to every eye which looked upon her admiringly. Her round, slender arms and swelling throat were burned and her brown hair was tossed by the wind — a coarser Fidelia, a fuller, evanescent bloom, a richer development under the twin suns of men's admiration and the glowing orb on high; a prophecy, perhaps, of what time might make of her.

Along the principal street of the town which skirts the tall, gray mountain, Fidelia was borne to her home, and lifted from her floral bower by a couple of red-shirted firemen, whose comrades gave vent to their enthusiasm in loud cheers for the great, the beloved engine, and the beautiful girl.

In the midst of their noisy merriment the door of the little house was thrown open and a woman appeared.

"Hush — sh! for God's sake! He's hurt. Dying, I guess."

"My father?" Fidelia's rosy face turned white.

The woman nodded and they went in together.

Fidelia's mother was weeping loudly at the foot of the cot, where her husband lay in a stupor, the perspiration beading his face, pale with the unhealthy, underground pallor of the mines, his great, strong chest laboring still to breathe, and his powerful, hairy hands twitching, restlessly clasping and unclasping.

It wasn't an uncommon accident. The cage had been run up into the sheaves by an incompetent substitute, as Grant, the engineer, was a deputy marshal in the procession, and so Franceston lay panting out the painful remnant of his life, as many a miner has done before and since.

Fidelia threw herself into her mother's arms and they sobbed together; the mother faded, ignorant, dressed in dark, coarse calico, the daughter radiant in her fanciful, soft-flowing white draperies, the brilliant tri-color sash with its glittering gold fringe still over her breast, the liberty cap upon her deer-like head.

When Franceston opened his eyes and saw them thus he called Fidelia to him.

"Don't cry, pretty. Never mind, never mind," he murmured soothingly. "Where's your friend, Fidelia—the Colonel? I want to see Thompson."

The Colonel had left his own cool saloon, on the best corner in Silver Hill, nodding to his partner as he went, and had crossed to Daley's, where he proceeded to break his rival's bank. The news of the accident to Franceston reached him here, and he answered the summons immediately, though sighing regretfully, for luck was with him. He was shown directly into the living room, where Franceston lay. They had not thought it best to carry him farther. When the two men were left alone, Franceston spoke.

"I wanted t' see ye, sir," he said — the Colonel's clothes entitled him to superior rank in Silver Hill, where only clergymen wore black — "I wanted t' ask ye if ye'd see after Fidelia when I'm gone."

"I assure you — " began the Colonel.

"Wait a minute," Franceston put a rough black hand upon the fine cloth of the Colonel's sleeve. "Ye see, the mother ain't enough for her. She needs the rein, I'm 'fraid. She's a purty little thing. Seein' her like that" — he nodded toward the sash and cap Fidelia had thrown at the foot of the cot — "seein' her in all that finery's made me think a bit. Lord knows I hadn't time to 'tend to her, an' the mother's weak an' kin' o' daft herself about gayety and novels — callin' the child Fidelia 'stead o' Fanny, my own mother's name! Don't let the little thing go wrong, sir. That's what I wanted t' see ye for. They'll have a little money — it's mighty little — that I get from the Union. I'll go easier if I know you'll look after her a bit, poor, pretty thing!"

The Colonel wiped his eyes and stroked his moustache.

"I promise you I'll care for Fidelia," he said with deliberation, and the miner heaved a sigh of satisfaction.

"That's right. I knew ye would. Thank ye, thank ye, sir. Now, I ain't got much time — bring 'em back."

. . . . . .

WILTON SEMINARY.
Monday Af.

Dear Col: — I'm going on the stage. Not right away, you know, but I'm going to be an actress. Will you please send me 50 to pay for ellocution lessons? I'll be awfully obliged, if you will. I'm taking Delsarte, too. That's extra. It will cost 50 more to pay for the term. Everybody says I'll be great. I was Cleopatra in the piece we played Founder's Day. I wore yellow swiss with spangles, cut low with no sleaves, sandals, and all my jewlery and all the girls got. I bought a jeweled snake over in the City. It cost 65. Did you get the bill? Everybody says I looked lovely and that I've got genius. Now, I'm crazy to go on the stage, and be great like Bernhard. Miss Payne — she teaches ellocution and Delsarte — thinks I can and she ought to know, and I'm prettier than that ugly old Frenchwoman anyway. I'll have my pictures all over, and I'll send you one every time I get a new one taken. How's ma and how's yourself and how's all the fire boys?

Write to me about the stage. Do you know any actors? They get ennormous salries, don't they? They say Bernhard's got sloughs of dimonds. And some day I'll come back to the Hill and make folks stare, you bet.

This is a picture of me as Cleopatra. Ain't it stunning? Show it to Jim and Bid of Liberty Hose Cart No. 3, and to Harley, shift boss in the Bertha, you know.

There's that old bell for recitation. I ain't good in Arithmetic and Grammar, and I hate poky things like Literture, and I just won't study Geography. But I tell you I'm a daisy speaking pieces. And I can sing quite good. I'm learning the mandolin, which is extra.

There's that nasty old bell again. Your affectionate

FIDELIA.

P. S. Thanks for the check.

The Colonel would have preferred a better spelled, more nearly legible letter. A misspelled word affected him like a disagreeable noise, but his prim, superlative, old-fashioned courtesy forbade mention of this fact. He wrote a reply to his *protégée* beginning, "Friend Fidelia," in which he gravely congratulated her upon her portrait, which nevertheless, he knew, could not do justice to her charms. As to the stage, he wrote that it was long since he had met any members of the dramatic profession, but that he had heard lately of the success of his old friend, Fred Farrell, in the East; that if he — the Colonel — could ever be of assistance in this or any other matter, she might command him. He begged Fidelia to pardon the brevity of his letter, for stocks were booming and, as she knew, he was largely interested. He enclosed a check for a large sum, trusted that she would be attentive and studious, and signed his letter, "Yours, etc., Thompson."

There were times when Fidelia's demands were not so opportune. The morning her dressmaker's bill arrived, the Colonel had just a dollar in his pocket. He had lost everything the night before. Stocks had tumbled, too, and his shares of Copperhead were quoted at half what he had paid for them. But the Colonel was ever sanguine, the most persistent bull in the market. After his breakfast at the Rotisserie the Colonel lit a cigar and started up the Row. He had tipped Pierre with his last dollar, for the Nevada berries and the delicate Tahoe brook trout crusted in breaded egg had been truly delicious. He walked along, taking off his hat to the women he knew, and bowing his tall, slender figure with that extravagance of antiquated chivalry which would have been absurd in any one else. He swung open the glass doors of the bank, and when he came out he had twenty-five twenty-dollar pieces in that purse of his which was so seldom empty. Old Graham, the most miserly, distrustful, meanest of men and of bankers, had advanced the money merely upon the Colonel's word — as would any man of wealth on the Hill, for the Colonel was "good as shares in Bertha."

When the Colonel returned the loan the following afternoon, he thanked the crabbed, gray-bearded banker. Then he leaned over the polished counter and, in the low, significant tone which even the children of Silver Hill know means a "point" in stocks, he said briefly: —

"Buy Copperhead."

Graham followed the advice as unquestioningly as would a church deacon the inspired words of an angel. As a matter of course, he expected to clear enough by the deal to furnish the Colonel the original loan many times over. But after this little transaction the Colonel wasn't in need of money. The stock market had recovered, and he had more shares of Copperhead than any one in Silver Hill except the mine's superintendent, who was his very good friend with really a genius for faro.

One morning when the game had closed early the night before, the Colonel stood upon the famous corner of the Row, which looks straight down the hill to where the crude little depot stands, three blocks below.

It is the custom of Silver Hill's gentlemen of leisure to stand

here at train time and watch the incoming passengers toil up the hill. Beside the Colonel stood the Judge, sober and straight and dignified this morning. Chatting with them was Long Phil Devany, the Colonel's red-bearded partner.

Among the crowd was a girl who climbed the unpaved, steep street with the graceful, buoyant step of one born and bred in the mountains. Her tall figure outdistanced the rest, and Devany recognized her while she was still a block below.

"It's Fidelia," he said.

"Impossible!" The Colonel felt for his gold-rimmed glasses.

"No, it's the young lady herself," said the Judge. "The handsomest girl on the Hill," he added, with the air of the connoisseur.

"What can bring her back so unexpectedly?" The Colonel hurried down the hill and met Fidelia half-way, taking her small satchel and her wraps, and putting her hand upon his arm to help her up the hill — which was quite unnecessary.

"How well you are looking, my child."

She smiled up at him. "I'm always well, you know."

"And always beautiful," he added gallantly.

She laughed aloud at this, and the crowd upon the corner, which they had reached by this, stared harder than ever.

"But what is the matter? What brings you home, and what shall I do with you?"

"Take me to the hotel, of course," she answered, leading the way, "and get me some lunch — Oh, there's that handsome Phil — Good morning, Judge — I'm famished, you know," she continued, turning to her escort.

They passed through the swinging hotel doors and Fidelia was shown to a room.

"It's just this," she said, running down the stairs a few moments later, quite at home and thoroughly happy, "I'm not going to school any more. I know enough—enough for me — and now I'm going to be an actress. Don't stare. You said you'd help me. Let's go to the Rotisserie." She took his arm and merrily pulled him along. "I've never been there, and I've always heard of the gorgeous things they give you to eat."

. . . . . .

Silver Hill had discovered a better, or worse, reason for Fidelia's sudden reappearance than she had given the Colonel. There were rumors, never mentioned in his presence, of a scandal in which she and a popular young actor in San Francisco had been concerned, and of her expulsion from the fashionable seminary near the city, where the Colonel's money had maintained her, and where her fellow-students had accepted her Paris gowns, her jewelry, her saddle horse, her boat, her unlimited supply of money, as evidence of the story she loved to tell about the mines she owned, her guardian — the poor Colonel! — and the dazzling future which awaited her.

But the three months which followed her arrival were only moderately dazzling. She attended all the parties, went to the theater, and promenaded up and down the four busy blocks of the Row till Silver Hill had seen and admired every pretty gown she had. All the eligibles and non-eligibles of the town dangled in her train.

Yet she wearied of so small a field, and her piquant face grew radiant with delight when the Colonel announced one day that his friend, Fred Farrell, was billed to appear at the town's one theater, and it was with an unshakable conviction of success that Fidelia followed him into the actor's presence the afternoon of his arrival.

"My dear Fred!" exclaimed the Colonel.

"Thompson, by Jingo!" Farrell leaped up and, seizing the Colonel with one hand, clapped him upon the back with the other.

"I was half afraid you might have forgotten me. Living as you do in the glare of success, surrounded as you are — " began the Colonel pompously.

"Bosh!" exclaimed Farrell. "You're as simple as ever. I verily believe your view of the stage is that of any stage-struck miss in her — in her —" He had caught sight of Fidelia, and experience had taught him what to expect.

"My — my ward, Miss Franceston," said the Colonel.

Farrell bowed and Fidelia smiled, her long, dark eyes lighting up and her strong, white teeth gleaming between the curling, parted lips. Farrell looked again. "Oh, that she might have talent!" he thought.

"It is on Fidelia's — Miss Franceston's account that I have ventured to intrude upon you."

"What, Thompson! You don't mean, in spite of old times, you'd have let me leave town without hunting me up? Well, Miss Franceston, I'm grateful to you for the chance of seeing the old Colonel again."

"Oh, I guess he'd 'a come anyway," said Fidelia.

Farrell's heart sank; her accent distressed him.

"Surely, surely," murmured the Colonel. "But we must not take up too much of your time, Fred. The case is this: My lovely young friend" — Farrell nodded appreciatively and Fidelia smiled and sparkled — "wishes to adopt the theatrical profession. In my humble opinion, she has ability. Will you hear her recite, and if you come to the same conclusion, as I've no doubt you will, assist her? Financially, of course, she is independent."

Farrell looked again at the girl, searchingly this time, and Fidelia, unaccustomed to impersonal observation, blushed rosily and her long-lashed lids fell.

"I shall be very happy," said Farrell.

Fidelia rose and laid aside her wraps. Her heart was beating with excitement, but she stood quietly before them with her ring-bedecked hands clasped behind her, her dashing, graceful figure outlined by the dark green of her tightly fitting gown, her chin well up and her fine, shining eyes looking over her hearers' heads out into the future. She seemed out of place in the commonplace barrenness of the hotel parlor. A palace or a rose garden would better have matched the grace and loveliness of this miner's daughter.

"All angels bless and guard her!" — Claude Melnotte's last words in the cottage scene from the "Lady of Lyons" — fell from the girl's pretty lips.

Farrell had sat motionless in the shadow. He rose now and joined in the applause of the Colonel, who was stamping, clapping his hands, and shouting "Encore!"

"Capital! Capital!" declared the ardent Colonel.

Fidelia was smiling, and, her tongue being loosened now, talked merrily.

"And when do y' think I can go on the stage? Right away? I hate to study, y' know, but I can learn things in a jiffy."

Farrell smiled perfunctorily, helped Fidelia with her light jacket, and handed her her long suède gloves. He smiled again, not so perfunctorily, as she stood for a moment at the door, her young, bright face glowing, her dark eyes smiling a good-by from under the dark green plumes of her large velvet hat.

"I'll have to talk it over with the Colonel, Miss — Miss Francesston. It's hard work, you know — "

Fidelia shrugged her shoulders and pursed her lips mutinously, while Farrell held the door open and she passed out into the corridor.

"What do you think, Fred?" asked the Colonel a little anxiously, when she had gone. "You've said so confounded little."

"Oh, I'll say enough now." Farrell's large, smooth-shaven face puckered into a distressed frown, while he passed his hand nervously through his thick, white hair. "The pretty little idiot doesn't know what she's saying. That's all. She has no more comprehension of the thing than a — than a Chinaman. She has patterned herself upon some cheap emotional actress. There'd have been no use in my telling her all this. You could no more get it out of that lovely head of hers — " He stopped in his excited walk up and down the little parlor and held out his hand appealingly to the stricken Colonel. "You could no more convince her that she isn't a genius than you could crush a piece of silver ore from the Bertha down there with your naked hand. She's just another young fool, unusually beautiful, whose stupid little head has been turned by theatrical talk. Moses! How I wish there had been something to her!"

The Colonel sat back dazed, helpless, hopeless. He was an expert in his own business, and expected others to be as proficient in their lines, and, therefore, from Farrell's decision there could be no appeal. Still, pity for Fidelia's disappointment prompted the question: —

"Couldn't she be taught? So far as money is concerned — " He jingled the gold in his pocket.

Farrell shook his head despairingly. "Why, it would take a

lifetime to make it clear to her that she doesn't know it all already. No, no! Let go, old fellow. There's nothing in her for the stage. Tell her so. I didn't dare. 'Fraid she'd cry, and she's so devilish pretty I couldn't stand it."

The Colonel sat in silence musing, his chin upon his gold-headed cane, his eyes bent upon the violently flowered carpet. To tell the truth, he was himself afraid to bear Farrell's decision to Fidelia.

The actor stood watching him, smiling to himself. Then suddenly he walked over to where the discouraged Colonel sat, and putting his hand on his old friend's shoulder, asked quietly: —

"Why don't you marry her?"

"God bless my soul!" exclaimed the Colonel aghast.

"You don't mean to say you never thought of it?" Farrell threw back his head and laughed and laughed. "You old simpleton! I'll bet you've raised that girl, spent shekels galore on her. Dresses and rings like that cost a few pennies, I happen to know."

"Why, Lord! Fred, I'm not a marrying man."

"Be one. You're still down there?" He nodded toward the corner in delicate allusion to the Colonel's profession.

The Colonel assented.

"Well, put aside some of your wealth. When you make a big winning in stocks — you're as lucky as ever? Ah! I thought so. Well, bank your spare cash, get a home, and marry this pretty little girl. She'll be all right after the first baby comes. Don't mind what I said. She'll never remember that she wanted to be an actress. There are millions of stage-struck girls who'll laugh at the memory of their fever, when they're cured. She'll make a nice little wife, and you, old fellow," he put an arm around Thompson's shoulder in an affectionate, womanish way, "you'll be anchored."

The Colonel was laughing and sputtering with embarrassment as he parted from Farrell at the door.

"If you'll have the wedding during my stay on the coast, I'll be best man," Farrell laughed.

When the door closed, however, the Colonel grew thoughtful. He paused in the corridor for quite five minutes; then he

straightened up, smiled a little conceitedly, pulled at his soft white moustache, and made straight for Fidelia's rooms, and took her out to walk.

"Fidelia, my dear," said the Colonel a little timidly, "have you noticed the beautiful display Harford has brought up from the city?"

They were standing in front of the jeweler's, a block up the Row. The Colonel made a practice of breaking bad news to a woman, if possible, before a jewelry store. He had found that it simplified matters wonderfully.

"Yes, ain't they gorgeous? But tell me now, what did he say after I left? Ain't he handsome? Will I go with his company?"

"N—no."

"Why not?" asked Fidelia.

The Colonel grew cautious and confused. "Because, my dear — because — now, that's an unusually fine stone — to the right. Yes, that's it. You see, he thinks — "

"My!" Fidelia drew in her breath in a delighted ejaculation.

"A very handsome stone. Quite five carats, I should judge, and very pure. Yes, Farrell thinks we've over-estimated your ability — just a trifle, my dear. Of course, I don't agree with him. Not at all! Not at all!" he added hurriedly.

Fidelia sniffed resentfully. But her mind was not large enough to contain two emotions, and just now her whole soul was filled with the glitter of the diamond which lay proudly, a single drop of dew, on the dark rose of its bed.

"It's bigger'n mine," she said covetously, pulling off her glove. "Yep, it's twice as big, and oh! the color of it! And he thinks I can't be an actress?"

"He thinks," said the Colonel slowly, watching the color ebb in her lovely dark face, "he thinks you're far too beautiful, my dear, to go on the stage. He says there are other lives, happier ones than the actress'. Fidelia — my dear girl — "

"What?" She looked up. His silence had aroused her from her greedy contemplation of the shining thing on the velvet cushion.

"My child," said the Colonel, his voice trembling now with

sympathy, "don't grieve over this disappointment. I hope, I trust — "

"But what'll I say to the girls?" she pouted. His tone more than his words had made her realize the shattering of her hopes. "They all know I wanted to be an actress, and they'll laugh at me." A salty diamond glittered on her dark lashes.

"My dear Fidelia, you're not crying? Come. Let's step inside."

He drew her arm in his and they turned to enter the shop. Suddenly the Colonel paused.

"Fidelia," he said, stopping in the doorway, "I'm too old for you — you're too young and too lovely for an old fellow like me. But if you'll marry me, my dear, I'll do my best to make you happy. I'm very, very fond of you, my love. I've always cared more for you than for anything in this world, ever since I carried you, a beautiful baby, in my arms, but — but I only realized it to-day. My dear, let me get the diamond for you, and — and let it be put in your engagement ring."

Fidelia had listened at first amazed, and then with a pleased smile on her glowing face. Even the old Colonel could not resist her. Should she consent? Here would be a sensation with which to stop the mouths of friends who would twit her with her failure. And the diamond! She looked again from the diamond, a very sun among the lesser jeweled stars, to the Colonel, tall, straight, irreproachably dressed, and — she could not fail to see it — full of devotion, his kindly gray eyes looking appealingly, tenderly down upon her.

"All right," she said, blushing and laughing, "if Harford can have the stone set before theater time."

. . . . . .

The November elections were close at hand. Colonel Thompson, in whom love had begotten ambition, had consented to run for a senatorship, a position in which he hoped to fulfil his public duties in a manner as honorable and dignified as that which characterized the discharge of his private affairs. His election seemed almost a foregone conclusion — the slurs of the opposition at the Colonel's profession only improving his prospects at the Hill — when the receipt of a tiny billet sent him suddenly out of town for several days.